



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE 3/07/11
HB 5885: AN ACT CONCERNING POTENTIALLY POLITICALLY BIASED LEGAL ADVICE
OF TOWN ATTORNEYS

GOOD MORNING SENATOR SLOSSBERG, REPRESENTATIVE MORIN AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE. I AM REPRESENTATIVE CLAIRE JANOWSKI FROM THE 56TH DISTRICT OF VERNON & ROCKVILLE.

I AM PLEASED TO SPEAK IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB 5885, AN ACT CONCERNING POTENTIALLY POLITICALLY BIASED LEGAL ADVICE OF TOWN ATTORNEYS. FIRST, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE COMMITTEE FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE TESTIMONY ON THIS BILL WHICH WAS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS AN ISSUE BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION BY A NUMBER OF CONSTITUENTS IN MY DISTRICT.

THE BILL IS VERY SIMPLE AND REQUIRES THAT ANY PERSON ACCEPTING A POSITION AS A PAID TOWN ATTORNEY PROVIDING RECOMMENDATIONS AND LEGAL ADVICE TO NON-POLITICAL DEPARTMENTS AS WELL AS A BI-PARTISAN COUNCIL RESIGN FROM A LEADERSHIP POSITION OF A POLITICAL PARTY (TOWN CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE BOARD, CAMPAIGN MANAGER, ETC.) UPON ACCEPTING THE POSITION OF TOWN ATTORNEY.

THIS IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO ENSURE THAT THERE IS NO PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL BIAS IN RECOMMENDATIONS OR LEGAL DECISIONS BEING GIVEN. IT WOULD ALSO SERVE TO MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF THE POSITION OF TOWN ATTORNEY AS A NON-POLITICAL ENTITY, AN EXPECTATION THAT IS HELD BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC. THAT EXPECTATION IS CLOUDED BY THE DUAL ROLE, OFTEN CREATING CONFUSION & ANXIETY IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT, ESPECIALLY DURING THE HEAT OF CAMPAIGN SEASON WHEN THE POLITICAL ROLE DOMINATES.

THE BILL IS A "GOOD GOVERNMENT" BILL DESIGNED TO SAFEGUARD THE INTENDED NON-POLITICAL NATURE OF THE TOWN ATTORNEY POSITION AS GOVERNED BY LOCAL TOWN CHARTERS. IT'S A COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO AN UNCOMMON SITUATION THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED.

THE BILL IS FAIR AS IT WOULD APPLY TO ALL POTITICAL PARTIES AND DOES NOT TARGET ANY ONE PART AND WOULD PROTECT ALL MUNICIPALITIES ALIKE.

IT IS SOMETHING THAT ALL POLITICAL PARTIES CAN EMBRACE AND SUPPORT WHOLEHEARTEDLY BECAUSE IT'S JUST PLAN, GOOD, COMMON SENSE.

FRANKLY, IT'S BAFFLING TO THINK THAT THIS COMMON SENSE LEGISLATION IS NEEDED AT ALL AND VERY TROUBLING THAT IT IS NOT PART OF ANY LOCAL REQUIREMENT FOR SUCH AN APPOINTMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I THANK THE COMMITTEE FOR HOLDING THIS PUBLIC HEARING AND URGE A FAVORABLE VOTE IN MOVING THIS IMPORTANT INITIATIVE FORWARD. PUBLIC HEARING. WOULD WELCOME ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.

Claire Janowski
State Representative
Vernon & Rockville